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HEBBEL'S USE OF THE HEXAMETER IN "MUTTER UND KIND"

It is proposed in this investigation to determine by an examination of the metrical structure of Hebbel's epic, *Mutter und Kind*, the views which the poet entertained with respect to the hexameter, and to what extent he applied his principles in the writing of the poem. Such an investigation involves chiefly such questions as the relationship of the German hexameter and the Greek; in what respects and to what extent Hebbel followed Greek models, and how far he deemed it necessary, in view of the exigencies of the German language, to depart from classic models; whether, in line with such rigorists as Voss and later Wilhelm Schlegel and Platen, he modeled his verse closely after the principles of the ancients, or whether, with Goethe and Schiller, he admitted such metrical innovations as he deemed expedient in the adaptation of the verse to the German language.

The hexameter, being a verse composed of feet of a varying number of syllables, cannot depend solely on a regular succession of accented and unaccented syllables to sustain its rhythm. It demands also of the poet that he give due attention to time measure (*Taktdauer*). The ideal hexameter would be one, each foot of which, when declaimed naturally, consumes an equal interval of time in the reading. In addition the arsis of each foot should be so well marked by the accent that it would stand out sharply in contrast to the thesis. Of decided importance is the element of the time measure. One has but to declaim an imperfect hexameter to note the natural tendency to dwell on feet composed of short syllables, and conversely to suppress heavy stem syllables in the thesis, and thus, by a method of compensatory lengthenings and shortenings, force each foot into the time measure. In Hebbel's verse—

Als mein Vater sie konnte, und seine goldenen Regeln

the fourth foot is too short. In reading one naturally stretches out the arsis in order to bring the foot into time with the dactyl of the preceding foot.

If one recognizes the importance of the time measure in sustaining the rhythm of the hexameter, there arises next the question of how this uniformity is to be attained in German. Minor¹ demonstrates convincingly that there is no constant relationship between time measure (*Taktdauer*) and syllable quantity. The natural quantity of the German syllable is too variable for it to assure uniformity of time measure. The position and environment of a syllable play a large rôle in determining its length. Many compounds have a different length when resolved into their elements. In parallelism and repetition a word of two syllables may often be unaccented and thus lose in quantity.

Closely related to the subject of time measure is the oft-discussed question as to whether or not the trochee is admissible in the hexameter. Goethe in *Reineke Fuchs* and in *Hermann und Dorothea* and Schiller in his hexameters used trochees generously. Later Goethe, acting on suggestions from Wilhelm Schlegel, in his *Elegies* approached more nearly to classic models. Schlegel was at first for admitting trochees under certain conditions, but he later became more rigorous and like Platen demanded the absolute exclusion of the trochee from the hexameter. But the question may not be settled thus by a dogmatic acceptance or rejection of the trochee.

It is just here that the question of the time measure plays its principal rôle. If a trochee can be found which fills out the time measure of the foot, then the rhythm will not be marred. And the non-constant quality of the German syllable makes this possible. The indefinite article *eine* as a verse foot will always do violence to the rhythm. It is capable of being shortened but not prolonged. But trochees may be admitted in the hexameter which have an arsis capable of being long sustained, or a thesis with a full vowel or a strong consonant. A natural pause between the two elements of the foot may also fill out the time interval of the foot. It is thus evident that the trochee can neither be generally excluded nor indiscriminately admitted in the hexameter. Each case must be judged separately.

An investigation of Hebbel's hexameters begins naturally with the variants of the MSS. Taking these variants as a starting-point

¹ J. Minor, *Neuhochdeutsche Metrik* (Strassburg, 1902), S. 281 ff.

one may note what metrical defects were apparent to the poet himself, and in what spirit and to what extent he corrected these deficiencies. It is at once evident that the question of the trochee was his chief difficulty. By far the largest number of his corrections deal with the trochee. It is also interesting to note that he approaches the correction of faulty trochees in a spirit quite in sympathy with Minor's view of their admissibility in the hexameter. In many cases dactyls are substituted for trochees, in others spondees are introduced, and in still others heavier and longer trochees take the place of the original foot which was not quantitatively long enough to fill out the time measure. The poem is not purged of short trochees, but where the correction of a faulty foot was possible without doing violence to the passage in question Hebbel generally made it. In some cases a revision has been undertaken in order to eliminate a succession of short trochees. In other cases the revision affects only one trochee. In the first group of citations such cases are given in which a dactyl is substituted for the original trochee where the trochee was so weak as not to fill out the time measure of the foot. In the following citations the first version gives the original reading and the second Hebbel's revision.

- 1 Eben graut der Morgen u. s. w.
Eben Grauet der Morgen u. s. w.
- 14 Schwören bloss, zur Nacht die Raupen noch voller zu stopfen
Schwören sich bloss, zur Nacht u. s. w.
- 61 Selten ruhig zu Hause u. s. w.
Selten gemächlich zu Hause u. s. w.
- 77 Aber wem es Gott im liebsten Freunde und Bruder
Aber wem es der Herr im u. s. w.
- 78 Vor die Augen stellt, dem ziemt es sich warnen zu lassen
Dicht vor die Augen stellt, u. s. w.
- 79 Hätte Wilhelm mich in solchem Elend gesehen
Hätte der Ärmste mich u. s. w.

In addition to the above citations there are 48 other verses in the poem in which Hebbel has eliminated a weak trochee and substituted in its stead a dactyl.

In the next group of citations a weak trochee is strengthened. In some cases this is accomplished by the substitution of a spondee. In others the foot still remains quantitatively a trochee, but its

elements are capable of a natural prolongation in enunciation. In some cases a natural pause occurs between the two elements of the foot, thus filling out the time measure.

- 1867 Wie die Hunde bei uns! Denn wäre der Schmied ein Franzose
 Wie die Hunde bei uns! Denn wäre der Schmied ein Franzmann
 8 Wie der Hahn auch rufe, der nicht bequem auf der Latte
 Wie der Hahn auch rufe, und wie vom Thurme herunter

The trochee of the fourth foot is strengthened in the revision.

- 1960 Und sie gingen in Trauer! Dann habt Ihr nichts zu besorgen
 Und sie gingen in Trauer! Mich dünkt ich sehe den Todten

The natural pause between the arsis and the thesis of the fourth foot in the revision makes an improvement over the original.

Besides the above cases 14 other revisions of faulty trochees are accomplished in the poem by the introduction of a foot of two syllables, in which the two syllabic elements are either long or capable of prolongation, or between the elements of which there occurs a natural pause.

Taking the sum total of these corrections which deal with the trochee, Hebbel's view of the admissibility of the trochee in the hexameter begins to make itself apparent. He recognized evidently that the natural quantity of the syllable plays a large rôle in the hexameter. But it was also evident to him that the strict following of the principles of natural syllable quantity in the spirit of the ancients could not be made the standard of excellence for the verse foot of the hexameter. Hebbel made 71 corrections of weak trochees. Fifty-four of the original trochees were replaced by dactyls. The remaining 17 were simply strengthened. As was noted before, these corrections by no means purged the poem of faulty trochees. But such do not abound. In the first 100 verses of *Mutter und Kind* there are 14 cases of such weak trochees. In the first 100 verses of *Hermann und Dorothea* there are 25 trochees which are open to the same criticism.

A number of Hebbel's revisions are concerned with the dactyls. Just as the trochee may mar the rhythm of the verse if it is too weak to fill out the time measure, so also a heavy dactyl of the form ˒˒˒ or ˒˒˒ may destroy the rhythm by overflowing the time measure. The following group of citations shows revisions undertaken

in the interest of the quantity and in some cases of the accent of the dactyl. In some cases the dactyl gives way to a spondee or trochee. In other cases a better dactyl is substituted for the defective original.

- 94 Abgefallen! Ich glaubte im Anfang, es wäre sein Vater
Die nicht denken! Ich glaubte zuerst, es wäre sein Vater

In the original the dactyl of the fourth foot is of the form $\acute{u} \acute{u} \cup$. The quantity of the foot is further increased by the feminine caesura. Hebbel substitutes a spondee in the revision.

- 109 Darum lässt er sie sitzen u. s. w.
Darum bleiben sie sitzen u. s. w.

The revision improves the accent of the arsis and shortens the syllables of the thesis.

- 130 Wenn sich der Arme es wagt, ein Gatte und Vater zu werden
Wenn der Arme es wagt, ein Gatte und Vater zu werden

The initial dactyl was too long and the accent uncertain because of the series of monosyllabic words.

Thirty-three verses in all have been similarly revised in order to improve faulty dactyls.

Besides these revisions of trochees and dactyls Hebbel has made two changes in his MSS to avoid the caesura at the end of the third foot. This caesura was avoided by the Greeks as well as by most of the writers of German hexameters:

- 17 Aber wer könnte sie tadeln, dass sie noch einmal sich umdreh'n
Aber wer könnte sie tadeln dass sie sich noch einmal herumdreh'n

The verse gains little in the revision. The dactyls of the third and fourth feet are too heavy and the accent of the fourth foot is not well defined.

- 276 Dennoch irrt er gewaltig, wenn er das Knattern des Bodens
Dennoch irrt er gewaltig, indem er das Knattern des Bodens

Five verses are revised to avoid hiatus: 309, 720, 1024, 1028, and 1632.

Reviewing Hebbel's revisions, both of trochees and dactyls, one is in position to judge of his theory of the relationship of time measure and syllable quantity. It is evident that he is not a rigorist like

Voss or Platen. He employs in his verse both short trochees and long dactyls which the rigorists would have condemned. But he also eliminates from his verses many defective trochees and numerous faulty dactyls. And here he is just in line with Goethe and the method which the latter employed in his hexameter. That which distinctly characterizes Hebbel's revisions is his recognition of the importance of time measure (*Taktdauer*) in sustaining the rhythm of the hexameter. Schlegel rejects a trochee because it is too short. But if a trochee, when declaimed naturally, can be made to fill out the same time interval as the other feet of the verse, then that trochee makes a good verse foot. Hebbel substitutes in several cases just such a trochee in place of a dactyl. Most often he makes the trochee measure up to the *Taktdauer* by choosing one between the elements of which there occurs a slight pause. This is the best testimony to the fact that Hebbel recognized the necessity of uniformity of *Taktdauer* in the hexameter. A long syllable in the arsis, plus a natural pause, plus a short syllable, may be taken as the formula for many of the trochees in *Mutter und Kind*. Such trochees meet all the requirements of a good verse foot for the hexameter. Evidence of the recognition of the same principle is the frequency with which Hebbel discards dactyls which involve a natural pause between the two elements of the foot. A dactyl of the form $\text{—} \text{—} \text{—}$, — (the comma represents the pause) would overflow the time measure. Whether Hebbel ever actually formulated the principle of subjecting his verse feet to this criterion of the time measure, and whether he recognized that time measure is often independent of syllable quantity, is immaterial as far as the result is concerned. If he depended solely on the accuracy of his ear the latter guided him in quite the right direction.

Hebbel, like Goethe, makes skilful use of the caesura to give variety to his verse. It may fall at the end of a simple sentence, 23, 41, 55; or it may precede an infinitive, 14, 78, 95; or it may come before a participial clause, 46, 70, 115; or it may separate the parts of a compound sentence, 10, 17, 25.

In 590 verses of the poem the caesura occurs after the accented syllable of the third foot (masculine caesura). In 542 cases (the poem contains in all 2,075 verses) the caesura falls after the first

unaccented syllable of the third foot (feminine caesura). In 559 verses there is a secondary caesura, the two pauses being variously distributed throughout the verse. Of frequent occurrence is the combination where the caesura occurs in the first and third feet of the verse, the verse being often introduced by a conjunction or expletive which gives rise to a natural pause.

16 Nun, man müsste sie loben, wofern sie sich rascher erheben.

Again, the two caesuras may occur in the first and fifth feet, in the second and fourth, or often in successive feet. In 83 verses we find the caesura in the second foot; in 177 verses it occurs in the fourth foot; while there are 56 cases of a single caesura in the fifth foot.

Goethe has comparatively few verses in *Hermann und Dorothea* in which there are three pauses. In Hebbel's poem there are in the first canto alone 22 verses in which there are three necessary pauses (the first canto has 244 verses in all). The effect produced is to disjoint the verse and make it lose the essential character of the rhythm of the hexameter. This, it would appear, was obvious to Hebbel also, for in the second canto there are eight such verses, while in the fifth there are only three. In the entire poem there are 61 such verses. It appears therefore that Hebbel recognized this defect in the earlier verses of the poem and sought to avoid it later as he proceeded with his work.

Seventy-five cases of the bucolic dieresis occur in the poem, sometimes in conjunction with a secondary caesura and sometimes as the sole pause in the verse.

The feminine caesura in the fourth foot was avoided by the Greeks. W. Schlegel noted that the two short syllables of the fourth foot usually formed with the preceding or following syllable a complete word. In the Latin hexameter the feminine caesura in the fourth foot appears commonly as the *caesura regens*. Klopstock makes use of it, but Voss, always a close follower of the Greeks, avoided it. Goethe used it nowhere very generously. There are 24 instances of it in the first 500 verses of *Hermann und Dorothea*. Later, acting on the advice of Schlegel,¹ he admitted its illegitimacy and revised various passages in the *Elegies* to avoid it. Hebbel

¹ J. W. Scholl, "Goethe and Schlegel's Epic and Elegiac Verse," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, July, 1908.

seems to have had no convictions against the use of it. There are 39 examples of the feminine caesura in the fourth foot in the first 500 verses of *Mutter und Kind*. None of his revisions reveal any attempt to avoid it.

The Greek hexameter did not permit the caesura at the end of the third foot, the result in such a case being not a jointed verse but two new verses each containing half the number of feet of the original verse. Makers of German hexameters have for the most part followed this law. Certain of Hebbel's revisions already noted have dealt with this difficulty. There are not more than a dozen verses in the whole poem which are thus divided in half by the caesura. And in several of these cases he has so combined this caesura with a secondary pause as to avoid the unpleasant effect of the division of the verse into two equal parts:

248 Nach der Kälte nicht fragend, nur nach der Stunde, verdrüsslich.

Here the unpleasant effect of the caesura at the end of the third foot is avoided by the presence of a secondary caesura in the fifth foot, the whole verse having *enjambement*. Other verses equally divided are 825, 938, 1,521, 1,964, etc.

In a few verses Hebbel has two pauses in the third foot:

735 Dieses gelt' uns als Zeichen! Doch, wie sie auch immer sich fassen.

In a few others the caesura is somewhat difficult to place with certainty:

815 Californien ist der offene Rachen der Hölle.

Minor makes interesting statistics dealing with what he calls the osteological construction of the Greek, Latin, and German hexameter. The proportion of feet of three syllables to those of two is in Homer 68:32. In Virgil the proportion is 40:60. Klopstock's *Messias* is closer to Homer than to Virgil, the proportion being 61:39. In Voss's *Homer* the proportion is 60:40. The same author's *Luise* shows the proportion 65:35. In Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs* the proportion is 49:51, and in *Hermann und Dorothea* 51:49. It will be seen then that Goethe's hexameters preserve the mean between Homer, in which feet of three syllables predominate, and Virgil, in whose verses feet of two syllables occur most frequently. In Hebbel's poem the proportion of dactyls to feet of two syllables is 65:59.

Hebbel's hexameters are therefore in this respect more closely akin to Goethe's than to those of Homer, Klopstock, and Voss. In other words, his verses show an increased use of feet of two syllables.

Considering the verse as a whole, we find in Homer, as between dactyls, spondees, and verses equally divided between the two, the following proportions: 7 (spondees): 61 (dactyls): 32 (equally divided). In the Latin hexameter the proportions are 40:20:40, Virgil being the representative. In Klopstock's verse the proportions are 13:47:40. Voss's Homer translation is almost like the *Messias*, the proportions being 12:44:44, but the *Luise* is more like the Homeric hexameter with the proportions 6:57:37. Goethe differs in this respect also from Homer, Klopstock, and Voss, his verses showing a predominatingly trochaic or spondaic rhythm, and in this point approaching more closely Latin models. The proportion in *Reineke Fuchs* is 32:24:44. In *Hermann und Dorothea* the same harmonious equilibrium prevails, the proportion being 27:28:45. And here again we find Hebbel's verse closely akin to Goethe's. In *Mutter und Kind* the ratio between trochees, dactyls, and verses in which feet of two and those of three syllables are equally divided, is 28 (trochees): 25 (dactyls): 47 (equally divided).

Considering the single verse feet we find the following relationships to exist in the first foot. In Homer the proportion of dactyls to spondees is in the first foot 60:40. In Virgil these proportions are exactly reversed and the proportions are 40:60. Klopstock's verse shows the proportions 52:48; Voss's Homer translation 54:46; and the latter's *Luise* 59:41. In Goethe's hexameters we find again a digression from the Greek models followed by Klopstock and Voss and an approach to the Latin. In *Reineke Fuchs* the proportions are 32:68, and in *Hermann und Dorothea* 27:73. In Hebbel's poem the proportion of dactyls to feet of two syllables is 40:63. He thus departs from the Greek usage and the strict imitators of the Greek models, but not so radically as Goethe in this respect.

In the second foot the proportion of dactyls to spondees is in Homer 60:40; in Virgil 46:54; in Klopstock's *Messias* 71:29; in Voss' *Homer* 65:35; and in the latter's *Luise* 73:28. In *Reineke Fuchs* the proportion of dactyls to trochees or spondees is in the second foot 77:28, and in *Hermann und Dorothea* 80:20. Hebbel is

again in line with Goethe with the proportions 83:20. The German hexameter in general prefers a dactyl in the second foot. Göttinger¹ finds the explanation in the fact that the caesura usually occurs in the third foot (near the middle of the verse) and gives rise to a rhythm which is momentarily rising in character. If the caesura occurs in a dactylic foot it must be either of the form $-/\sim-$ or $\sim/\sim-$, and in each case a rising inflection is produced. The natural falling rhythm of the hexameter is best brought out by a dactyl in the second and fifth feet; hence the predominance of the dactyl in the second foot.

In the third foot we find in Homer 84 dactyls to every 16 spondees. In Virgil the proportion is 40:60. Klopstock and Voss follow again the Greek models, the proportion being in the *Messias* 72:28, in Voss's *Homer* 69:31, and in the *Luise* 65:35. In *Reineke Fuchs* there are 55 dactyls to every 45 trochees in the third foot. In *Hermann und Dorothea* these proportions are exactly reversed. In *Mutter und Kind* there are in the third foot 49 dactyls to every 55 trochees. Hebbel again follows Goethe in *Hermann und Dorothea*.

In the fourth foot Homer shows the proportions 68:40. The Latin hexameter departs again radically from the Greek. In Virgil the proportion of dactyls to spondees in the fourth foot is 29:71. Klopstock also gives the spondee a slight preference in the fourth foot. The proportion in the *Messias* is 48:52. In Voss's *Homer* there are 51 dactyls to every 40 trochees, but in the *Luise* the proportion is 63:37. Goethe prefers Klopstock's and Voss's usage here. The proportions in *Reineke Fuchs* is 31:69, and in *Hermann und Dorothea* 42:58. Hebbel's hexameters show in this point also their relationship to Goethe's, specifically to *Hermann und Dorothea*. In *Mutter und Kind* there are in the fourth foot 50 dactyls to every 53 trochees.

Reviewing these statistics of the dactyls, trochees, and spondees, we find that Goethe in the second foot gives the preference to the dactyl. In the third and fourth feet, however, he prefers the foot of two syllables, his hexameters being in this respect more closely related to the Latin than to the Greek models. Goethe's decided fondness for the trochee in the first foot is entirely new in the history

¹M. Göttinger, *Die deutsche Sprache und ihre Literatur* (Stuttgart, 1839), II. Teil, S. 565 ff.

of the German hexameter. In each of these points we find Hebbel's verse closely related to Goethe's. Hebbel prefers the dactyl in the second foot, gives the preponderance to the trochee in the third and fourth feet, and shares Goethe's fondness for the trochee in the first foot. If we use the letter *d* to indicate a dactyl and the letter *t* to represent a trochee (or a spondee), it will be found that Goethe's favorite form for the hexameter is *tdttdt*. This is also Hebbel's favorite verse form. Out of 2,075 verses 311 are cast in this form, sixteen forms being possible, and all of them having representation in the poem. This is undoubtedly the form of the hexameter which yields the smoothest verse in German. The caesura usually falls near the middle of the verse. Therefore the falling cadence of the hexameter is best achieved by dactyls in the second and fifth feet.

Summing up results from the foregoing it becomes apparent that Hebbel in the making of his hexameters followed *Hermann und Dorothea* rather closely. His attitude with respect to syllable quantity is practically the same as that of Goethe. Hebbel was not a rigorist like Voss or Platen. He used both short trochees and long dactyls generously. But his revisions reveal a very sane view with respect to time measure and syllable quantity. Like Goethe, where it was possible without doing violence to the passage in question, he revised weak trochees and heavy dactyls. And these revisions are apparently based on an accurate sense for time measure. That is to say, a good verse was one in which each foot, when enunciated naturally, filled out an equal time interval. If a dactyl or trochee filled out the time measure naturally it was a good verse-foot. If it did not fill out this time interval, or if it overflowed it, it was not a good verse-foot. Hebbel recognized also that natural syllable quantity, even when strictly adhered to in the making of dactyls and spondees, did not always insure uniformity of time measure. A dactyl with more than one long syllable is under certain conditions metrically possible in the hexameter. And a trochee may also under conditions measure up to the standard of a good verse-foot for the hexameter.

Hebbel follows the rigorists in avoiding verses with the caesura after the third foot. In no other respects is he at pains to observe their dicta. For example, he makes no effort to avoid the feminine caesura in the fourth foot, in this point not even following Goethe,

who admitted its illegitimacy but did not always avoid it. With respect to the osteological construction of the hexameter Hebbel follows Goethe also. As compared with the Greek hexameter and its imitators Goethe and Hebbel employ far more feet of two syllables than the former. Trochees predominate in the third and fourth feet as well as in the first, in which last innovation Hebbel again follows Goethe.

Hebbel evidently took *Hermann und Dorothea* for his model. It may be said of the result that *Mutter und Kind* from a metrical standpoint is very well worthy of being compared with Goethe's epic.

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